

TRAINING PORTUGUESE TEACHERS USING BLENDED LEARNING – A DIFFERENT APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is present a Postgraduate Specialization with a different concept of the traditional ones. Instead of having to follow a curriculum previously established, hard and sequential, time-limited, you can choose the frequency of any course units according to their availability and current needs. It is not a proposal it is already a work in operation, working in Blended Learning. In the chapter of the education in Portugal teachers in primary and secondary education have their activity of teaching is developed in accordance with the fundamental principles enshrined in the Portuguese Constitution and within the framework of the general and specific principles under the Ministry of education. Considering the teachers' training needs to perform in-service training that are intended to ensure the updating, improvement, retraining and support for the profession of teaching staff, aiming at further development objectives in career and mobility under this Statute.

KEYWORDS

Teaching; Education; Training; Blended Learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

A possible solution to the basic and secondary teachers' needs is presented in order to make actions for incrementally training, thus benefiting the teachers for career development. We will see how to proceed to perform this progression and how teachers can benefit from the credits they acquire from completing the modules of the curricular units (CU), not being necessary to sustain the UC in its whole or without having to complete a graduate degree that had been prepared.

Thus this flexibility in the preparation of post-graduations in modular form and semi-in personae, meets the busy day-to-day needs of teachers who do not want to leave behind their career progression.

Nowadays it is a very worrying factor in our country, as there are always a high percentage of not placed teachers in the national teacher selection procedure and every year there are recent graduates in the labour market, not contributing for the improvement of these numbers.

2. TEACHING IN PORTUGAL

In a summarized form, we will try to clarify how the education system in Portugal (basic, secondary and post-graduate degrees) is structured, as well as explain how the career of basic and secondary education teachers develops and give an example of training offer different from standard offerings.

2.1 Educational System Structure

The existing Educational System in Portugal, which has been in force since the 2011/2012 academic year, is represented in **Figure 1**.

The Portuguese Educational System is organized in 4 study blocks:

1st Block: Pre-school education - pre-school education is intended for children aged between 3 years and the entry into compulsory schooling; frequency is optional and is ministered in nursery (Public and Private).

2nd Block: Basic education - it has a duration of nine years (1st to 9th grade) and it is organized in three sequential cycles. The 1st Cycle works in a one-teacher scheme (and with resource to expert teachers in certain areas) and it aims at the development of basic skills in Portuguese language, mathematics, Environment Study and expressions.

In the 2.^o cycle, the teaching is organized by subjects and multidisciplinary study. In the 3.^o cycle, the teaching is organized by subjects. The main objectives of this cycle are the knowledge and skills development, which are necessary to get to active life or to continue studying. In Basic Education, the Vocational Education is embodied in the courses of education and training (EFC) and vocational courses.

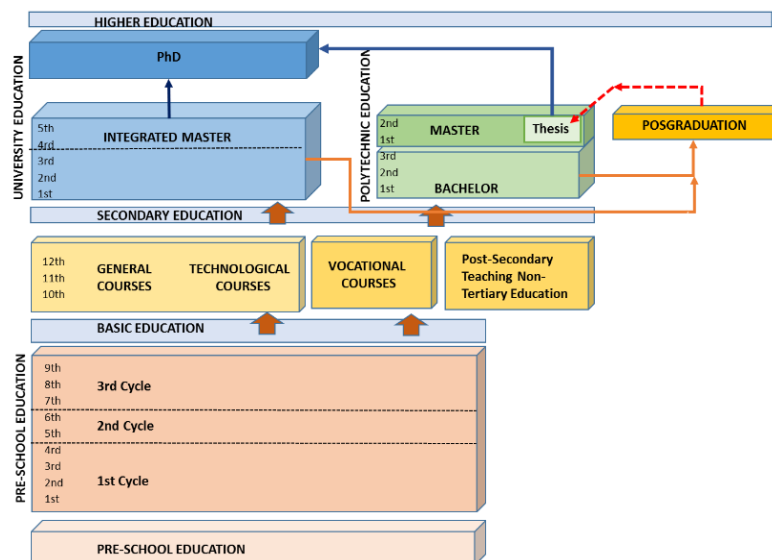


Figure 1. Portuguese Educational System

3rd Block: Secondary education - it is oriented for either the continuation of higher studies, either to the world of work. The curriculum of courses secondary level has a referential of three years (10th to 12th form) and it enlarges the following courses: (1) The Scientific-humanistic Courses - essentially for students who want to continue to university-level studies; (2) Professional Courses - essentially for students who want to get to the world of work, also allowing the continuation of higher studies. They are organized by modules in different areas of training; (3) Specialized artistic teaching courses - essentially for students who seek to ensure artistic training specialized in the areas of visual arts, audiovisual, music and dance, allowing the entry into the world of work or the continuation of higher studies; (4) Learning Courses; (5) Education and Training Courses (The CEFs also exist in Basic Education: Type 1, 2 and 3).

Post-Secondary Teaching Non-Tertiary Education - The Technological Specialization Courses (CET) enable specialized training courses in different areas of technology, allowing the insertion in the world of work or the continuation of studies on the upper level. The training undertaken in CET is credited under the upper course in which the student is accepted.

4th Block: Higher education - it is structured in accordance with the principles of Bologna and it aims to ensure a solid scientific preparation. The higher education is organized in university education and in polytechnic education, administered by institutions of higher education, namely public, private or cooperatives. In higher education the following academic qualifications are attributed: First Degree (Bachelor), Masters degree (Master) and Doctorate (PHD). This last one (PHD) is only given by university education (but not by polytechnic education).

Postgraduate courses - The courses enable specialized training courses in different areas of technology, allowing the continuation of studies on the upper level. The training is credited under the upper course in which the student is admitted. It is organized in university education and in polytechnic education, administered by institutions of higher education, namely public, private or cooperatives. In Higher education is not attributed the academic degree, but gives a college certificate of skills, and it is the academic basis of the Masters degree (Master).

2.2 Teaching Profession Career Code

The teaching profession career code of childhood educators and teachers of elementary and secondary schools, hereinafter referred to as the Code, applies to teachers, whatever the level, teaching cycle, group of recruitment or area of training, which work in the various forms of education and non-higher education system, and in the context of public establishments of pre-school education and of elementary and secondary schools in the dependence of the Ministry of Education.(DL 75/10, point 1, Art.1, CAP.I) (ECD, 2010).

The teaching staff activity develops in accordance with the fundamental principles recognized in the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic and in the framework of the general and specific principles set out in Articles 2 and 3 of the Educational System Basic Law (ECD, 2010).

For now a little more about the childhood educator, teachers of elementary and secondary schools career, we refer to the Teaching Career Statute some important points for this our implementation (ECD, 2010).

Rights (DL 75/10, Art.4 of Art.9, CAP.II); Duties (DL 75/10, Art.10 to Art.10-C, CAP.II); Training (DL 75/10, Art.11 to Art.16, CAP.III); Teaching career (DL 75/10, art.34, CAP.VII); Career progression (DL 75/10, Point 2.C, Art. 37, CAP.VII); (...) c) Frequency with use of training modules that match, the average number of years of stay in step, 25 hours per year or, alternatively, specialized training courses.

This point (DL 75/10, Point 2.C, Art. 37, CAP.VII) is very important and is one of the reasons which led us to proceed with the provision of training that will present in Section 3 in order that those interested in career advancement could have specialized training offer.

Considering the training needs of teachers in doing continuous training so that they are intended to ensure the update, the improvement, conversion and the support for the professional activity of teaching staff, aiming to further development objectives in career and mobility in accordance with this Code. This continuing training must be planned so as to promote the development of the professional skills of teaching staff.

3. POSGRADUATION IN EUROPEAN UNION AND THE WORLD

Doing research on the concept of posgraduation in the European Union, as well as in the world, we found that the concept is similar to that in Portugal, which is an existing teaching block in higher education and the analyzed literature, it was found that the workings they are similar to undergraduate courses and existing master's degrees in various educational institutions. These are courses that are also regulated/advertised to run in the school year and semester, as well as those found advertised and working in Portugal (Posgraduation, 2015; Posgraduation, 2016).

The main difference of our proposal is that there is the concept for all CUs may be operated simultaneously provided that there is registered students, that is, open the pre-registration is open for all CUs. Once the minimum number of students to particular CU is reached. We Contact the students to perform the actual registration and starts the same. By repeating the process whenever and for the necessary CUs without obeying the rules of the semester and academic year. So is our audience are interested in specialized certifications they will choose when CUs gives them way and according to their needs or training, interest or career. Either theme or temporally.

4. OUR TRAINING OFFER

Therefore, to meet the need of the market in offering graduate in the area of specialization of the primary and secondary school teachers to obtain the credits for career advancement. Post graduations which are teacher tailor-made were created. Thus, the Institute Superior of Engineering of Porto (ISEP) prepared a postgraduate to act in this area, divided into two parts, one, more education and other more technological. An innovative training offer.

What makes these postgraduates different?

- Each CU is independent, Flexibility in CUs frequency, Postgraduate degree, Possibility of enrolling in a branch of IT Engineering Masters.

4.1 Postgraduate Specialization in Technology and IT applied to Education

The structure of these postgraduate specialization offers is distinguished by the flexibility in frequency of different Curricular Units (CU), constituting each one of them as an action of accredited training by the Scientific Council-pedagogical of continuing training (CCPFC). Instead of following a curricular plan previously established, driven and sequential and limited in time, you can choose the frequency of any CU according to your availability and current needs. The course is organized into a total of 60 credits (ECTS), covered with eight CUs. The total number of hours of each CU contemplates classroom instruction and classes in e-learning, thus allowing a more flexible management of the sessions. The trainees can choose to follow the pre-established curricular plan or, alternatively, attend, in separate regime, the CUs that are more adequate to its needs, making the post-graduation conclusion dependent on the completion of all CUs that integrate the correspondent study plan. The course is organized into 2 instruction and e-learning classes, thus allowing a more flexible session management.

Trainees can choose to follow the pre-established curricular plan or, alternatively, attend, in separate regime, the UCs that are more adequate to its needs, making the post-graduation conclusion dependent from the completion of all curricular units that integrate the correspondent study plan.

Aimed to basic and secondary education teachers, to graduates in the education area and other professionals, providing the domain of the technical aspects in the Information and Communication Technologies area, this post-graduation allows the achievement of credits to the progression of the Teaching career, aims the continuous learning in the Information Technologies in education area, allowing the teachers, educators and other professionals specialization in areas and also aims to continuous learning in the area of technologies to support the Education, allowing the specialization of teachers, educators and other professionals in areas related to information technologies, driving innovation of its pedagogical practices, through the use of Information and Communication Technologies, corresponding to a total of 60 ECTS, covered with eight CUs in both postgraduations.

4.1.1 Postgraduate Specialization in Educational Support Technologies

The total number of hours of each CU includes in classroom to educational support technologies, developing innovation of its pedagogical practices through the use of educational practices with technology.

Table 1. Postgraduate Specialization in Educational Support Technologies

CUs	ECTS	T	PL	OT
Information and Communication Technologies in Education (TICE)	7,5	1	3	1
Fundamentals and Power Training Models for Technology (e-Learning) (FTEC)	7,5	1	3	1
Tools to Support the Teaching/Learning Process (FAPE)	7,5	1	3	1
Repository of Educational Resources (RRED)	7,5	1	3	1
Learning Management Platforms (Moodle) (PGAP)	7,5	1	3	1
Project Seminar (SPRO)	7,5	0	4	1
Electives (TWO of the following)				
Interactive Tables in Collaborative Learning (QIAC)	7,5	1	3	1
Digital Arts (ARTD)	7,5	2	2	1
Multimedia Systems in Education (SMED)	7,5	1	3	1
Remote Experimentation in Educational Context (ERCE)	7,5	1	3	1
Image, Audio and Digital Video (IAVD)	7,5	1	3	1
Teaching Art (ARTE)	7,5	2	2	1
Sign Language in Education (LGES)	7,5	1	3	1

T-Theory; PL-Practice Laboratory; OT- Guidance Tutorial

4.1.2 Postgraduate Specialization in Educational IT

The total number of hours of each CU includes classroom to information technology in education, developing innovation of its pedagogical practices through the use of technology in educational practices.

Table 2. Postgraduate Specialization in Educational IT

CUs	ECTS	T	PL	OT
Educational Software Engineering (ESED)	7,5	1	3	1
Image, Audio and Digital Video (IAVD)	7,5	1	3	1
Web Programming (PWEB)	7,5	1	3	1
Network Administration (ADMR)	7,5	1	3	1
Digital Educational Resources (REDI)	7,5	1	3	1
Project Seminar (SPRO)	7,5	0	4	1
Electives (TWO of the following)				
Mobile Platforms (PMOVV)	7,5	1	3	1
Digital Arts (ARTD)	7,5	2	2	1
Graphics Systems (SGRA)	7,5	1	3	1
Educational Games (JOED)	7,5	1	3	1
Teaching Art (ARTE)	7,5	2	2	1
Remote Labs (LARE)	7,5	1	3	1

T-Theory; PL-Practice Laboratory; OT- Guidance Tutorial

4.2 Units Option

Gathering the number of credits/ECTS corresponding to the total required for the post-graduate, even if obtained in different academic years, you will be given the post-graduate specialization diploma and a bonus in credits/ECTS.

Each CU is made by Workshops, in principle 4, which each teacher can choose separately according to interest or availability. Each Workshop assigns credits and valid certification to teaching career progression, but it is mandatory to make the full set of UC workshops to have the CU ECTS. At your pace, you create your curricular plan making the CU according to needs, interests and availability.

As workshops and consequently the CUs are performed in blended learning (classroom + work and remote support), teachers are allowed to manage their choices.

Another strong point is the non-existence of semesters, over the year, academic or civil, because the concept gets itself confused as the workshops are always open to enrollment. As long as there are enough students, the class starts. It is an incremental process that will always work if the teachers that need of credits for the career development, are thinking on self-investment, without being stuck to academic years, semesters, annual fees and other patterns of traditional higher education. We, therefore, consider it an added value to the model.

Furthermore, being eager to continue training, progressing to the Master degree, has the possibility to integrate an associated branch of the Master Degree in Computer Engineering according to the admission rules in force.

4.3 Reached Results

These Post graduations are already in operation, we have completed 3 UCs successfully. We have obtained the results: Enough [10-12] - 11%; Good [13-15] – 44%; Very Good [16-17] – 33% and Excellent [18-20] – 12%. There was not any failure until now. The motivation behind these teachers to be students again is much stronger than any discouragement that leads to withdrawal. The Blended Learning model also is a strong motivation.

5. CONCLUSION

Given the status of the scenario of the current teaching career and the changes that are already provided for under Portuguese law, the teachers of primary and secondary schools will have to invest more in their professional training or for competitions to schools or for career advancements.

These Post-graduate specializations in technologies and computer applied to education seek to come meet these professionals, either in content or in operating mode, allowing a flexibility that most schools do not offer. Fees are paid to the workshop, registration is permanently open and with enough subscribers the module advances. There is no concept of semester or school year. All CU are open since there is interested. It is a concept of continuity and always in Blended Learning system.

As mentioned in point 4. what makes these postgraduates different?

- Each CU is an independent credited training action.
- Flexibility in CUs frequency: personal curricular plan to suit your interest, making post-graduation completion dependent from the completion of all curricular units that integrate the correspondent study plan.
- Postgraduate degree when achieving the required total credits/ECTS.
- Possibility of enrolling in a branch of IT Engineering Masters, according to the admission rules in force.

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